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## PEASANT INITIATIVE AND MONASTIC ESTATE MANAGEMENT IN 10<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY LOTHARINGIA

*Iniciativa campesina y gestión dominical monástica en la Lotaringia del siglo X*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the degree of economic and political autonomy of peasants in monastic estates in 10<sup>th</sup> century Lotharingia. While it is beyond doubt that local societies were deeply enmeshed in networks of aristocratic control, it is also possible to identify areas of autonomy. Monastic lordship was not all encompassing as it was structurally limited in its capacity to control every aspect of peasants' lives and to prevent all forms of disobedience. Despite the violent and sometimes arbitrary nature of aristocratic power, negotiations between peasants and lords played an important role, especially as peasant households developed a form of subsistence economy that involved production for commercial exchange. In this context, some monasteries were willing to grant more productive means and autonomy to peasants. These initiatives were sometimes supported by a paternalistic «vocabulary of lordship» and a «moral economy» that patronized peasants, but could also be mobilized to support their interests.

*Keywords:* Peasant Agency; Monastic Estates; Lotharingia; Lordship; Moral Economy.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo examina el grado de autonomía económica y política de los campesinos en los dominios monásticos de la Lotaringia del siglo X. Aunque es indudable que las sociedades locales estaban profundamente imbricadas en redes de control aristocrático, también es posible identificar espacios de autonomía. El señorío monástico no lo abarcaba todo, ya que se encontraba estructuralmente limitado en cuanto a su capacidad para controlar todos los aspectos de la vida de los campesinos y para prevenir todas las formas de desobediencia. A pesar de la naturaleza violenta y a veces arbitraria del poder aristocrático, las negociaciones entre campesinos y señores jugaron un papel importante, especialmente cuando las familias campesinas desarrollaron una forma de economía de subsistencia que conllevaba una producción para el intercambio comercial. En este contexto,

algunos monasterios estaban dispuestos a otorgar más medios productivos y autonomía a los campesinos. A veces, estas iniciativas estaban apoyadas por un «vocabulario de señorío» paternalista y una «economía moral» plasmada en un patronazgo sobre los campesinos, pero que también podía movilizarse para apoyar sus intereses.

*Palabras clave:* Agencia campesina; Dominios monásticos; Lotaringia; Economía moral.

SUMMARY: 0 Introduction. 1 Peasant autonomy and economic initiative. 2 Peasant autonomy and disobedience. 3 Conclusions. 4 References.

## 0 INTRODUCTION

Peasants, we understand, were not passive. Yet we usually think of peasant initiatives as reactive, and for good reason: peasants, whether serfs or not, were subordinate when not oppressed. Whatever the social, economic, or political arena in which they acted, powerful outsiders set the rules. Perhaps that was not so uniformly true as we often think, but that was certainly the way peasants understood, or said they understood, their place in the world<sup>1</sup>.

Excavations at Vallange (France, Vitry-sur-Orne) have revealed a medieval settlement that was abandoned in the fifteenth century (fig. 1 and 2)<sup>2</sup>. Two phases can be distinguished. Six farmsteads located on the north-east of the excavated site were occupied simultaneously during the eighth-ninth centuries. Around 900 they were abandoned and a new, remarkably regular, settlement was established to the south-west of the site. Farmsteads are aligned perpendicular to the trackway. Each settlement unit has access to a well in front of the farmstead and fields expand behind each of them, forming a regular field-system with ridge-and-furrow. The excavators do not hesitate to qualify Vallange a planned settlement<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> BUSHNELL, John. *Russian Peasant Women Who Refused to Marry. Spasovite Old Believers in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017, p. 291. I thank Ilya Afanasyev and two anonymous reviewers who provided very useful feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> BLAISING, Jean-Marie; GÉRARD, Franck and BURNOUF, Joëlle. *Vallange, un village retrouvé: Les fouilles archéologiques de la Zac de La Plaine*. Vitry-sur-Orne: [no editor given], 2006; GÉRARD, Franck. «La structuration du village pour une économie agraire planifiée à la fin du IX<sup>e</sup> siècle en Lorraine. Les sites de Vitry-sur-Orne et de Demange-aux-Eaux». *Archéopages*, 2012, vol. 34, p. 38-47; GÉRARD, Franck. «Le village lorrain du Moyen Âge à nos jours. Architecture et organisation spatiale des maisons». *Archéopages*, 2014, vol. 40, p. 104-119.

<sup>3</sup> GÉRARD, «La structuration du village», p. 41.



FIGURE 1. *General map of the region and places mentioned in the article.* ©N. Schroeder.

Early medieval settlement planification has often been understood as a «top-down» process. The influential geographer Hans-Jürgen Nitz (1929-2001), for example, has argued in a series of publications that regular settlements of the *Waldhufen*-type were introduced in Francia by monastic communities who engaged in the «colonization» of

uninhabited upland areas<sup>4</sup>. In his view, early medieval planned settlements were necessarily the result of aristocratic intervention, while peasant initiative resulted in the formation of irregular settlement patterns. To a certain extent, this perspective is rooted in the idea that only aristocrats disposed of the material and intellectual resources that are required to establish planned settlements:

The population of the new settlements could be drawn from the unfree population of the older villages. Stock, tools, seed and food for the first years of colonization when the new settlers were unable to feed themselves from their own resources could be supplied from the abbey's extensive property [...]. Finally, we may assume that the monastery had a good supply of intelligent people – among monks as well as among laity (*ministeriales*) – who were able to organize the colonization process<sup>5</sup>.

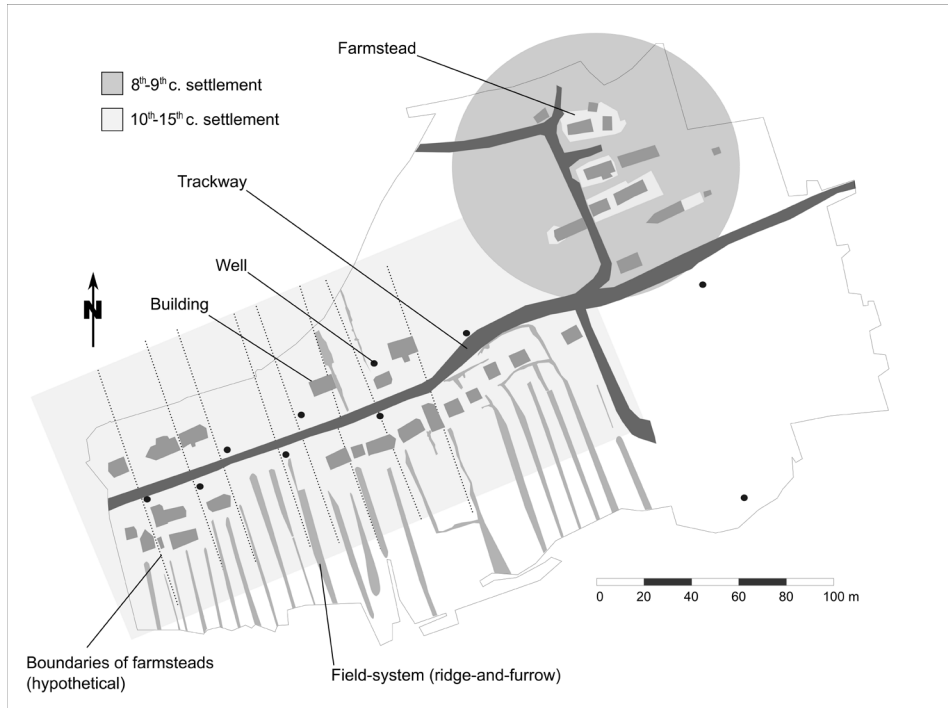


FIGURE 2. Excavation plan of Vallange, Lorraine. ©Drawing by N. Schroeder based on documents provided by INRAP and Franck Gérard.

<sup>4</sup> NITZ, Hans-Jürgen. «The Church as colonist: the Benedictine Abbey of Lorsch and planned *Waldbufen* colonization in the Odenwald». *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1983, vol. 9/2, p. 105-126. Critical discussion in SCHROEDER, Nicolas. «Der Odenwald in Früh- und Hochmittelalter. Siedlung, Landschaft und Grundherrschaft in einem Mittelgebirge». *Siedlungsforschung. Archäologie, Geschichte, Geographie*, 2016, vol. 33, p. 355-386.

<sup>5</sup> NITZ, «The Church as colonist», p. 111.

However, the assumption that only elites disposed of the necessary resources to plan layouts and co-ordinate the organization of space is not universally accepted. Hendrik Anthonie Heidinga argues that «local native farmers must also be considered capable of establishing order in their home environment»<sup>6</sup>. Focussing on the field-systems of high medieval England, Chris Dyer points out that:

It is very tempting to see in the symmetry of some villages, in the use of units of measurements in their layout and in the regularity of field systems, the hand of the landlord as the single authority capable of systematic organization. [...] However, we do know that field systems were rearranged by a combination of lords and village communities in the later Middle Ages [...]. Because of the remoteness of many lords from the concerns of the village, and the underdevelopment of administrative machinery in the period before 1200, we should surely open our minds to the possibility, indeed the likelihood, that villagers rather than lords were responsible for the planning of villages and field systems<sup>7</sup>.

Without rejecting the influence of aristocrats, Helena Hamerow has suggested that, beyond economic factors, the internal social and cultural dynamics of local societies might have influenced the planification of settlements:

While the more bounded, measured, and defined use of space within settlements may in part reflect the increasingly firm grip exerted by local aristocrats on the land and the people who worked it, it is also likely to reflect more closely defined social roles and relationships, such as an increased concern with marriage patterns and rights of inheritance<sup>8</sup>.

This paper is a contribution to this debate about the social forces that shaped the early medieval countryside. It also engages, on a more general level, with the problem of the organization of labour and the articulation of social relations. Historians have long questioned to what extent both aristocrats and peasant «communities» (or, to use a less loaded expression, «groups of neighbors») affected and oriented the economic activities of early medieval peasants<sup>9</sup>. This debate is complex because topics such as the relative autonomy of producers or the collaborative dimensions of agricultural work are mobilized in various «grand narratives», for example about the transition from slavery to feudalism or the origins of rural communities and some institutions of contemporary nation-states. As such, they have been treated in a long and complicated historiography<sup>10</sup>. Following

<sup>6</sup> HEIDINGA, Hendrik Anthonie. *Medieval settlement and economy north of the Lower Rhine: Archaeology and History of Kootwijk and the Veluwe (Netherlands)*. Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1987, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> DYER, Chris. «Power and conflict in the medieval English village». In DYER, Chris. *Everyday Life in Medieval England*. London/New York: Hambledon and London, 1994, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> HAMEROW, Helena. *Early medieval settlements. The archaeology of rural communities in North-West Europe 400-900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the discussions in WICKHAM, Chris. «Le forme del feudalesimo». In *Il feudalesimo nell'alto medioevo*. Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo, 2000 (Settimane di Studio, 47), vol. 1, p. 33-34 and ZELLER, Bernhard *et al.* *Neighbours and Strangers. Local Societies in Early Medieval Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, p. 88-95.

<sup>10</sup> See ZELLER *et al.*, *Neighbours and Strangers*, pp. 3-16.

the approach developed over the last decades by various historians with an interest in the early medieval countryside, this paper tries to set these meta-narratives aside and to focus empirically on written material that sheds light on the sociology of early medieval peasant societies at the local level<sup>11</sup>.

A few charters and miracle stories from 10<sup>th</sup> century Lotharingia provide interesting information about the relationship between groups of farmers and monastic overlords. Micro-historical analysis of these documents reveals the importance of monastic influence in the countryside, but also suggests that peasants could take initiatives and had some degree of autonomy in the organization of farming and their everyday life. To a large extent, this micro-historical approach also reveals the language and the body of legal and moral references mobilized by monastic overlords in their communication with peasants, a topic recently discussed by Rosamond Faith for Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman England<sup>12</sup>. These aspects also deserve attention, as they reveal much about conflicts, but also about shared social values and the way they could be understood and instrumentalized by different social groups.

Two aspects will be explored in turn: firstly, we will discuss examples of peasant autonomy and economic initiative; secondly, we shall look at cases of peasant disobedience and what they reveal about the limitations of lordship.

## 1 PEASANT AUTONOMY AND ECONOMIC INITIATIVE

Charles West has recently discussed the interactions between peasants and lords in 10<sup>th</sup> century Lotharingia. One of the important points of his argument is that already in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the peasantry of the region between Marne and Moselle was deeply enmeshed in networks of aristocratic control<sup>13</sup>. Lords requested services and rent from peasants; they occasionally used intimidation and physical violence to obtain what they desired<sup>14</sup>. Yet, West also observes that «a kind of independence of action is visible from time to time, for example through apparently harmonious, “horizontal” rural co-operation, often expressed through co-operative veneration of saints [...], but sometimes through more prosaic matters like guarding granaries, or haymaking [...]»<sup>15</sup>.

A revealing 10<sup>th</sup> century example of this type of collective action that indicates a certain degree of autonomy in the organization of everyday life is transmitted in Adso of

<sup>11</sup> See, for example: DAVIES, Wendy. *Small Worlds: The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany*. London: Duckworth, 1988; WICKHAM, Chris. *The Mountains and the City. The Tuscan Apennines in the Early Middle Ages*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988; KOHL, Thomas. *Lokale Gesellschaften: Formen der Gemeinschaft in Bayern vom 8. bis zum 10. Jahrhundert*. Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> FAITH, Rosamond. *The moral economy of the countryside. Anglo-Saxon to Anglo-Norman England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> WEST, Charles. *Reframing the feudal revolution. Political and social transformation between Marne and Moselle, c. 800-c. 1000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 64 and 148-149.

<sup>14</sup> WEST, *Reframing the feudal revolution*, p. 56-57.

<sup>15</sup> WEST, *Reframing the feudal revolution*, p. 65.

Montier-en-Der's (c. 910/20-992) Life of saint Mansuetus<sup>16</sup>. One day, a large number of «rustics» from the region of Bar-le-Duc gathered with carriage and food «as is their custom», to purchase salt in Vic-sur-Seille<sup>17</sup>. They exchanged the items they had brought with them to obtain the precious commodity and made their way back home. However, they encountered some difficulties in Gondreville while attempting to cross the river Mosel. Locals, who were celebrating saint Mansuetus on that day taunted them for not venerating the holy man on such an important occasion. The travelers jokingly dismissed their invitation, arguing that they were not concerned, as Mansuetus is not their patron. The saint took offense at their attitude and suddenly, the peasants' oxen turned against their owners, chasing and attacking them. The peasants dashed to the saint's altar and promised to be more respectful and cautious in the future. Mansuetus allowed them to go back home without further trouble.

This anecdote shows two groups of locals apparently acting autonomously, without direct involvement of aristocrats. On one side, we find an assembly of locals brought together by the veneration of the same saint. More relevant to our discussion is the other group of «rustics», who teamed up to make a long journey and purchase salt (200 km, that is at least a week with oxcarts). Adso's narration does not only suggest that there was some level of independence from overlords in the daily organization and management of peasant economies, but also that there was a certain degree of co-operation between households. Several 10<sup>th</sup> century charters provide information that converges with this short anecdote.

In 995, a certain Albricus came to abbot Immo of Gorze (984-1008), asking to rent demesne land (*terra indomnicata*) located in Alincourt<sup>18</sup>. The charter which records these events specifies that the land lay waste at the time and that it was of no use to the monks (*absa nobisque omnino inutilis*). As the abbot had no better project for it, he

<sup>16</sup> *Quodam tempore, ut moris est rusticorum, quidam Barrinsium partium non parvo numero rustici, grege facto, sumptis vehiculis et redarum copiis, Vicos expetierant salinarum, datisque in coemptionem rerum venalium convectionibus, ad sua redire cupientes, salis commertia referebant, et iam ex maxima parte expleto itinere, Gundulfi villam transgressi, ad abeum Mosellę cum illa sua reda squalentes labore rustici pervenerunt, ubi objectu transmeandi fluminis aliquantulum intricati, a loci illius incolis duriter sunt inveci, cur eo die rotalibus actibus insudantes, in tanti patris, quę ea die annua colebatur, sollempnitate, tamquam agrestibus animis communis laetitię se paterentur non esse consortes. Rustici hęc econtra ludibriis prosequuntur, dicentes hęc sacra ad illos non pertinere, nec quicquam cum hac celebritate habere commune, quam solis Leuchorum populis nossent debitam et votis civilibus excolendam. His ita contumaciter persistentibus, ultio divina prosequitur. Mira dicturus sum. Tam subito rabies miseris illis animalibus incubuit, ut se invicem consertis cornibus appeterent, et cunctis videntibus maximum terrorem incuterent, infelices vero rustici, pene ab humanis sensibus excedentes, circumquaque vagabundi ferrentur, bovesque versi in amentiam, pęnas suorum luerent dominorum. At illi in quibus vigoris animi aliquid resederat, ecclesiam beati pontificis celerius irrumpentes, reatum suum publice confitentur, votis se et supplicationibus astringunt de cętero fore cautiore si, pęnis presentibus erepti, liberi redire potuissent. Nec distulit sanctus voces audire gementium, quibus et misera armente restituit et abeundi facultatem donavit. ADZO OF MONTIER-EN-DER. *Vita sancti Mansueti* [BHL 5210], chap. 24. In GOULLET, Monique (ed.). *Opera Hagiographica*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2003 (Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, 198), p. 159-160.*

<sup>17</sup> About salt production in Lorraine, see HIEGEL, Charles. «Le sel en Lorraine du VIII<sup>e</sup> au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle». *Annales de l'Est*, 5<sup>e</sup> série, 1981, vol. 33/1, p. 3-48 and, for this episode in particular, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> D'HERBOMEZ, Armand. *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Gorze, ms. 826 de la bibliothèque de Metz*. Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1898, n. 121, p. 219-220.

agreed to rent it out (*ad censum concederemus*) to Albricus, his wife Oda, and their heirs. The land comprised half a *mansus* and five *jornales*. Each year, Albricus would have to pay twenty-five pennies for it<sup>19</sup>. Half of this amount would be delivered in May and the other half at the yearly fair<sup>20</sup>. He would have to face the law if he were unable to pay in due time, but he would not lose the land<sup>21</sup>. Almost twenty years earlier, another charter was written up about demesne land of the monastery of Gorze. It is only transmitted as a copy in the monastery's cartulary<sup>22</sup>. It records that in 977, abbot Odelbert (975-984) gathered the inhabitants of Gorze. These individuals were subjects of the monastery's lordship (*potestas*). According to the charter, Odelbert wanted to reward them for their obedience and faithful service. Eighteen male inhabitants, whose names are listed in the charter, were granted a close located next to the spring of the river Gorze. This tract of land belonged to the office of the prior. It was lying waste at the time, because the previous prior had uprooted the grapevines that were growing in it. The charter specifies that for seven years, the farmers would have to provide everything necessary to produce grapes themselves (*de suis propriis, omnia necessaria, tam in victualibus quam in cultura, subministrantes*). During this period of time, they would not pay rent and were allowed to sell the produce for their own benefit. From the eighth year on, the most fertile half of the vineyard would be transferred back to the abbey and the other half would remain with the farmers and their descendants<sup>23</sup>. There was one restriction: these vineyards should not be sold to anyone else than the abbey, unless the monks are unable or unwilling to purchase them.

These charters call for several observations. Firstly, they both indicate that peasants were expected to produce surplus destined for market exchange. Albricus had to pay rent in money (on the day of the fair, which probably indicates that he was expected to sell his production and pay rent on the same day). The eighteen farmers from Gorze were given the right to sell their produce for their own profit (rather than keeping it for their own consumption) for seven years. Secondly, these charters contradict the notion that monasteries were necessarily in a better position than peasants to make investments and develop farming activities. Gorze owned land, but to make it fructify, it relied on the capital, labour, and knowledge of local farmers. This observation is, of course, particularly interesting in the general debate about the role of peasants and overlords in the planification of agrarian landscapes. Albricus obtained a single field. It is rather unlikely that the recorded transaction led to major transformations of the local field system. In the second case, things look a bit different, as a relatively large group of individuals was given the collective responsibility to organize and manage an entire vineyard for seven years. It is of course impossible to know whether the rhetoric of generosity developed in the charter

<sup>19</sup> *Statuimus etiam tu proinde annis singulis denarios XXV in censum persolvat*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 121, p. 219.

<sup>20</sup> *Medietatem vero predictorum denariorum persolvat mediante mense maii, et reliquos ad annale mercatum*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 121, p. 219.

<sup>21</sup> *Si tardus aut negligens extiterit, cum lege componat, sed adeptam terram minime perdat*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 121, p. 219.

<sup>22</sup> D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 115, p. 209-211.

<sup>23</sup> D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 115, p. 210.



accurately reflects the social dynamics of this transaction. It might well be that farmers were forced into this arrangement by the abbot. However, it is clear that while the burden of capital investment was placed entirely upon their shoulders, they were also given free initiative in the organization and management of the vineyard.

These case-studies indicate that, while we should certainly not consider that there were «autonomous» peasants sheltered from any form of aristocratic influence in 10<sup>th</sup> century Lotharingia, overlords did not exert direct control over all sectors of peasant economic activity. As the case of Gorze makes clear, in several instances, it seemed more profitable for large monastic landowners to rent out their land and to focus essentially on the collection of rent and services. This gave peasants (as individuals or collectives) a relative autonomy in the organization of production, especially when rent was collected in money rather than in kind. As both miracles and charters suggest, monastic estate management sometimes relied upon intermittent oversight that left some autonomy to locals rather than permanent and close control.

An episode of Sigehard's Miracles of saint Maximin, which he wrote in the 960s, mentions the monastic estate of Weimerskirch, that had been granted as a benefice to a lay aristocrat<sup>24</sup>. This man was treating the dependants of the estate unfairly. Looking for an opportunity to blame them, he came up with a plan<sup>25</sup>. He asked one of them, who was more boorish than the others, to take care of one of his hunting birds. As he knew that this man lacked any skill in this art, he was expecting a mistake that would give him an opportunity to castigate the peasants. Indeed, the rustic had the bad idea to keep the bird in his house, where it suffocated to death because of the smoke<sup>26</sup>. The peasant took off the bird's feathers and tried to preserve it using salt, hoping this stratagem would allow him to stay out of trouble on the day of rent collection (*tempore exactionis*)<sup>27</sup>. After a long period of time, the lord asked for his bird and received its dead body<sup>28</sup>. He blamed the peasant's relatives for his failure and announced that an assembly (*placitum*) would be held the next day during which they were to give him all their cattle and many would be beaten with rods<sup>29</sup>. During the night, the victims of this plot decided to send out two

<sup>24</sup> *Est villa monasterii quae Wimari ecclesia dicitur, quam saevissimus quidam (cujus nomen memoriae nostrae elapsum est) in beneficio habuit.* SIGEHARDUS, *Miracula sancti Maximini* [BHL 5826]. In *AA.SS. Maii*, t. VII, p. 29. About this miracle collection, see KRÖNERT, Klaus. «Les *Miracula sancti Maximini* (BHL 5826): entre hagiographie et historiographie». *Revue Bénédictine*, 2005, vol. 115/1, p. 112-150 (about this episode in particular, see p. 128-133).

<sup>25</sup> *Qui cum sancti familiam gravissime affligeret, etiam non inveniens quid eis, unde culpari possent, objiceret; uni eorum, qui agrestior ceteris videretur, accipitrem suum custodiendum commisit; sciens rusticum illius artis nullam habere peritiam, ut dum ales neglecta deperiret, intuitus culpam in rusticum retorqueret.* SIGEHARDUS, *Miracula sancti Maximini*, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Servavit interim vivam sine esu, in domo fumica cito morituram.* SIGEHARDUS, *Miracula sancti Maximini*, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> *Qua mortua, plumas ei detraxit, ac sale conspersam domino servandam suspendit. Putabat enim stulta rusticitas, se astutiam callidi hominis evasuram, si ei vel cadaver avis tempore exactionis incorruptum valuisset exhibere.* SIGEHARDUS, *Miracula sancti Maximini*, p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> *Cumque iam revoluto longi temporis spatio, immitis dominus accipitrem suum a rustico exegisset; ille protinus cadaver obtulit.* SIGEHARDUS, *Miracula sancti Maximini*, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> SIGEHARDUS, *Miracula sancti Maximini*, p. 29.

young men to the monastery with gifts (*eulogias*). They brought them to the altar of saint Maximin and prayed to him. Instantly, the cruel aristocrat died with terrible abdominal pain.

This story illustrates how arbitrary and violent practices of lordship could be in 10<sup>th</sup> century Lotharingia, but also that direct interactions between lords and peasants occurred only from time to time at assemblies (*placita*). During these gatherings, rent was collected, new tasks were attributed, and disobediences were punished. Sigehard's short anecdote – which, I should point out, is full of disdain for rustics and their perceived stupidity – perfectly illustrates that lords did not care *how* peasants organized themselves to meet the demands that were made to them. All that mattered was the result. Similar conclusions can be drawn from a charter copied in the cartulary of Gorze. This document reports that under the abbacy of Odelbert (975-984) a woman named Isimerdim and her son Bernierus, who were pressured by poverty, had to sell the tenure (*mansus*) they had received from abbot John (968-975) to one Dodo for five shillings<sup>30</sup>. Sometimes after this event, a *placitum* was held in the estate. Isimerdim and Bernierus accused Dodo of having bought this tenure illegally<sup>31</sup>. Dodo gathered six witnesses. He gave five shillings to the provost Theuterus and beseeched him to be granted the holding<sup>32</sup>. The provost agreed. Dodo received the tenure and the matter was put to rest. However, at a subsequent *placitum*, the quarrel was reignited<sup>33</sup>. This time, Dodo went to the monastery with presents (*exenia*) for abbot Odelbert and the provost Theuterus (respectively nine and five shillings!). He also «behaved fittingly» with the monk Adericus, who was heading the *placitum*. His generous and subservient strategy paid off: the tenure was confirmed to him again for a rent of three chicken and fifteen eggs a year, as well as a bannal contribution. Finally, Dodo approached the abbot and the monks a third time «with services» in order to be granted the charter which records these events<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> *Bone si quidem memorie Odelberto, Gorzie presidente abbate, ac Theutero, preposito, contigit quandam feminam, Isimerdim nomine, et Bernierum, filium ejus, qui eos paupertas attenuarat, ut mansum suum, quem a domino Johanne, abbate suo, comparaverant, servitio et statuto censu tenuerant, jure hereditario, supra nominato Dodoni, acceptis ab eo solidis quinque, traderent et condonarent; quem denuo tenuit semper, habuit atque possedit.* D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 119, p. 215-216.

<sup>31</sup> *Postea, jam multis evoluitis diebus, habitum est placitum in eadem villa, in quo derogantes Dodonem incusaverunt eum terram, quam servilem dicebant, fraudulenter sibi et contra jus vendicasse.* D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 119, p. 216.

<sup>32</sup> *Ille, propriis secum assumptis testibus Johanne, Geldulfo, Rahero, Aherico, Gundelando, Baldulfo, et in presentiam predicti T[heuteri] veniens, tu sibi legem concederet suppliciter expetiit, donans pro hoc solidos v.* D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 119, p. 216.

<sup>33</sup> *Subsequenti tempore, dum aliud teneretur placitum, rursus querimonia exorta, cum se nimis molestari conspiceret ac quietari, instanter Gorzie coactus est domnum predictum Odelbertum abbatem expetere, simulque T[heuterum] prepositum, cum exenio solidorum novem uni alteri sol. v, conducente se Aderico monacho, qui eidem preerat placito, in omnibus super hoc consulere se cupiens; cujus benigne voluntati parentes simul et precibus, supra memoratum mansum ipsi, cum communi seniorum omnium voluntate, tradiderunt ac condonaverunt, ad persolvendum, tu prius donatus fuerat, censum per singulos annos pullos III, ova quindecim cum banno; interdicientes ne quis eum ulterius unjuriare vel inquietare presumeret.* D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 119, p. 216.

<sup>34</sup> *Post quorum denique decessum, ut se quietum esse ac possidere liceret quod acquisierat, ad nostram cum servitio rursus accessit mansuetudinem, supplex expostulans sibi a nobis scriptum firmitatisque fieri.* D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 119, p. 216-217.

This fascinating anecdote calls for several observations. Most importantly, this narration suggests that in some estates, tenants were able to exchange tenures and land freely, without monastic intervention. A representative of the monastery was sent out to the estate on the day of the *placitum* to supervise the estate, provide justice, and probably also collect rent. As suggested by Sigehard's anecdote, some tenants only experienced face-to-face interactions with their lords on occasions of this type, that could be relatively rare (*i.e.* *placita* or when they had to travel to an estate centre or the monastery to deliver rent or work the demesne). To some extent, Dodo's story suggests that in 10<sup>th</sup> century Lotharinga overlords such as Gorze did not necessarily keep detailed records that allowed them to minutely track changes in the allocation of tenures<sup>35</sup>. Tenants were exchanging and selling their tenures below the radar of monastic estate managers. The evidence does not suggest that the abbot and his monks perceived this as a problem: as long as rent and services were perceived without disruption, there was no need for closer scrutiny or intervention. Local assemblies of tenants, gathered in *placita*, formed a pool of witnesses who could be questioned when needed. The fact that Dodo had to pay his way to undisputed tenancy clearly shows the lack of interest of Gorze for local realities and arrangements. Reading between the lines of the charter, it seems rather clear that Isimgerdim and her son had a good case. Economically, a widow and her son were probably easy prey for ambitious farmers with capital to invest<sup>36</sup>. However, in this particular case, they were able to gather enough support in their community and entourage to organize a standoff that was sustained over several *placita*. Because of its inherent bias – Dodo paid to get a document which confirms his version of the events –, the charter does not reflect this side of the story. Yet, without some sort of support, the widow's claims would probably have been dismissed easily and Dodo would not have been compelled to pay a large sum of money to win the case. The abbot, provost, and monks did visibly not care much about fairness or the «truth» in this case: what mattered was stability. Dodo was subservient and willing to make presents to his overlords. To put it bluntly, he appeared as a safe choice with benefits. Yet, the charter shows that although Dodo had won the monastery's support, once its representatives were gone, the locals remained on their own, with their quarries, conflicts, and tensions. Neighbors could exert pressure on Dodo again and bring up the same case in the following *placitum*, with the hope of a different outcome.

These few examples should prevent us from seeing aristocratic control as permanent and all encompassing. There is no doubt that peasants who belonged to monastic estates were always within a framework that implied some contact with overlords. Those powerful outsiders collected rent and asked for labour services; they were the ones who provided justice; they could generate new obligations, but also opportunities, for example by giving access to land. However, on a daily basis, many decisions were taken without

<sup>35</sup> About this lack of «bureaucratic» management in monastic estates in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, see BERKHOFER, Robert F. *Day of reckoning: Power and accountability in medieval France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, pp. 10-52.

<sup>36</sup> About the economic fragility and vulnerability of tenant widows, see the discussion in DEVROEY, Jean-Pierre and SCHROEDER, Nicolas. «Land, oxen, and brooches. Local societies, inequality, and large estates in the early medieval Ardennes (c. 850-c. 900)». In QUIRÓS CASTILLO, Juan Antonio. *Social inequality in early medieval Europe: Local societies and beyond*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2020, pp. 190-191.

direct aristocratic influence. In the cases discussed so far, this part of autonomy was fully accepted by monastic overlords, who did not have the intention to manage the business of «rustics» more closely unless this benefited them economically. Yet, as I will argue in the second part of this article, there was a threshold beyond which peasant autonomy was clearly perceived as excessive. Some behaviors were condemned and punished. This does not necessarily mean that peasants did not engage in them, but in such cases they were – knowingly or not – disobeying.

## 2 PEASANT AUTONOMY AND DISOBEDIENCE

In 960, Gerhard, abbot of St-Martin in Metz issued a charter about the descendants of individuals living in Waldorf near Cologne, who had been given to his monastery by king Sigibert III (c. 630-656), to serve as fiscal men (*figalini*)<sup>37</sup>. After some time, because of the distance (c. 190 km), language differences (Gorze and Waldorf are located respectively in Romance and Germanic speaking regions), and the laziness of estate officers, these individuals stopped serving the monastery and paying rent<sup>38</sup>. They claimed that they had no knowledge nor memory of owing any service to St-Martin. The abbot had a hard time making his case as no record attesting the claims of the abbey could be found in its archives. He could only rely on a royal charter provided by king Otto (936-973) to prove the dependency of the estate<sup>39</sup>. However, when he arrived in Waldorf and asked to receive what he was owed, «those who had escaped to freedom» (*ipsi in libertatem elati*) refused<sup>40</sup>. The king then ordered that those who do not obey the abbot should be expelled from their tenures. Finally, the abbot and his monks wrote up a formal account of these events in the presence of count Hudo and the advocate Bernhard. This charter, which is copied in the thirteenth century cartulary of the monastery of Stavelot, states that St-Martin owns one hide of demesne land next to the church and a forest in Waldorf, and that it is owed four pounds in pennies of Cologne a year as well as two thirds of the grape harvest<sup>41</sup>. It is signed by the abbot, six monks, count Hudo, the advocate,

<sup>37</sup> HALKIN, Joseph and ROLAND, Charles Gustave. *Recueil des chartes de l'abbaye de Stavelot-Malmédy*. Bruxelles: Kiessling, 1909, vol. 1, n. 78, pp. 177-178. The copy of the charter does not name the estate, but a later charter (see note 42) allows us to conjecture that it is about Waldorf.

<sup>38</sup> *Postmodum uero propter longinquitatem terre et lingue diuersitatem seu rectorum signitiam paulatim seruitium omne ea legitima antiqua habuere et abnegare ceperunt in quantum ut eorum pene nulla nobis esset noticia seu memoria*. HALKIN and ROLAND, *Recueil des chartes*, vol. 1, n. 78, p. 177.

<sup>39</sup> *Tandem perquisito quod apud nos habetur testamento et eorum iure in noticiam reuocato non aliter potuimus aliquid uindicare nisi precepto domni Ottonis regio ipsius nobis munificentia collecto*. HALKIN and ROLAND, *Recueil des chartes*, vol. 1, n. 78, p. 177.

<sup>40</sup> *Cuius auctoritate fulti cum habitatores illius uille conuenas debitam exigeremus et reddere ipsi in libertatem elati negarent dominus rex nisi ad nostram se aptarent uoluntatem precepit omnes eici*. HALKIN and ROLAND, *Recueil des chartes*, vol. 1, n. 78, p. 177.

<sup>41</sup> *Qua propter domni Hudonis comitis et Bernardi aduocati seu aliorum honorabilium uirorum flexi precibus hanc noticiam fieri concessimus in qua quit deinceps nos exigere et illos omni anno persoluere conuenit inseri uolumus. Statuimus ergo tenere ad opus nostrum mansum unum iuxta ecclesiam et forestem unam que uocatur Liethforest et uineas omnes reliquam uero terram ipsi teneant et successores eorum ita ut annis singulis IIII-or libras*

as well as the mayor of Waldorf and four individuals who pledged that the rent (*census*) would be delivered. These men are evidently some of the farmers claimed by the monastery. Interestingly, the cartulary of Stavelot also contains another charter, which records that in 1033 abbot Nanther of St-Martin eventually exchanged Waldorf against two other estates belonging to the monastery of Stavelot<sup>42</sup>. This document records that because of the distance, the monastery of St-Martin was still struggling to obtain services and rent from Waldorf. It was now owed eight pounds, but this seemed a very low income for an estate of thirty tenures (*mansi*).

This episode suggests that monastic estate management was not always very systematic. It only relied partly upon written documents. The destruction, loss, or careless treatment of archives could erase the institutional memory concerning particular estates and dependants. If left unattended, local managers were not always doing their duties faithfully. As pointed out by Isabel Alfonso, local groups could put a lot of pressure on individuals who acted as the lord's representatives<sup>43</sup>. In such situations, distance could be an important obstacle, as physical presence and routine were needed to keep control over an estate. With the case of Waldorf, we encounter a situation in which these factors were playing against the monastic overlord. Abbot Gerhard tried to get help from the king in order to make up for the lack of documents, distance, and the absence of a customary routine presiding over rent payment and the execution of services. This strategy paid off in the short term, as a new charter confirming the monastery's rights could be obtained. In the confrontation with peasants, the abbot could wield royal authority by proxy and threaten to chase tenants from their holdings. However, as the second charter suggests, this strategy was not sustainable in the long run. The same structural difficulties emerged again and brought the monastery to exchange its estate against another seventy years later.

The charter which records these tensions conveys the point of view of the abbot and the monastic community. The motivations and strategies of peasants are of course not reflected directly in this document. However, a few elements are worth noticing. According to the charter, the dependants simply negated owing rent and services to St-Martin, effectively «escaping» from their status and gaining «liberty». The fact that the law presiding over the dues within estates was essentially customary and transmitted

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*denariorum Coloniensium in festiuitate sancti Martini persoluant et uineas omnes cultas et incultas bene excolant terciam partem fructus accipientes.* HALKIN and ROLAND, *Recueil des chartes*, vol. 1, n. 78, p. 177.

<sup>42</sup> *Hic Nantherus abbas quoddam bonum habuerat in comitatu Othemedensi uillam scilicet Walendor uocatam respicientem ad altare sancti Martini de qua quoniam a loco longe aberat uersus Coloniā nullum seruitium nullum poterat habere respectum sed in tantum ad nichilum iam uenerat ut nichil census nichil seruitii preter VIII solidos ipsa solueret curtis que plus XXX mansis constabat de quo etiam censu ipsi abbati contrarium ab ipsis debitoribus euenerat.* HALKIN and ROLAND, *Recueil des chartes*, vol. 1, n. 122, p. 247-250. Also see BRESSLAU, Harry. *Die Urkunden Konrads II.* Hannover/Leipzig: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1909 (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Diplomatum regum et imperatorum Germaniae*, 4), n. 189, p. 251-252.

<sup>43</sup> ALFONSO, Isabel. «La contestation paysanne face aux exigences de travail seigneuriales en Castille et Léon. Les formes et leur signification symbolique». In BOURIN, Monique and MARTÍNEZ SOPENA, Pascual. *Pour une anthropologie du prélèvement seigneurial dans les campagnes médiévales (X<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles). Réalités et représentation paysannes. Colloque tenu à Medina del Campo du 31 mai au 3 juin 2000.* Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004, pp. 299-300.

orally made it possible for peasants to deny owing particular services. Monastic overlords did not necessarily have the means to make their demands prevail in such a situation, especially in an estate that was located far away from their monastery and main estate centers. Of course, monastic overlords could find powerful allies, such as the king, and peasants had to factor in that blunt disobedience could lead to repression. Therefore, strategies of disobedience were often more subtle than the frontal denial attempted by the inhabitants of Waldorf<sup>44</sup>.

A charter dated 977 records that twelve inhabitants of Gorze's estate in Flomerseheim came to the local estate officers (monks and secular persons) with presents and services in order to get more land<sup>45</sup>. Their inquiry was accepted, and the officers granted them tracts of demesne land<sup>46</sup>. When abbot Odelbert (975-984) found out about this, he initially intended to take back the land as this situation was harmful to the abbey. However, considering the «labour of poor men», he decided to discuss the matter with his entourage<sup>47</sup>. Finally, he allowed the tenants to keep the land against payment of appropriate rent and services<sup>48</sup>. A charter was written up to record these decisions and more men of the estate asked to be granted land<sup>49</sup>. Odelbert agreed to their demand, «for God and the peace of the poor»<sup>50</sup>.

We have already discussed two charters referring to Odelbert<sup>51</sup>. Both are about peasants' access to land. It might well be that the abbot tried to reorganize Gorze's estates

<sup>44</sup> About those forms of peasant resistance using the «weapons of the weak», see SCOTT, James. *Weapons of the weak. Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1985.

<sup>45</sup> *Homines nostros de villa Flammereshem, que est in Wormatie partibus, nostros ministeriales, monachos videlicet et laicos, sepius illuc directos, adisse cum muneribus et servitiis, tu aliquid terre sibi concederent*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 114, p. 207. About this charter, see DEVROEY, Jean-Pierre. «Du grand domaine carolingien à la «seigneurie monastique». Saint-Remi de Reims, Gorze, Saint-Vanne de Verdun (880-1050)». In: IOGNA-PRAT, Dominique; LAUWERS, Michel; MAZEL, Florian and ROSÉ, Isabelle. *Cluny. Les moines et la société au premier âge féodal*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013, pp. 279-298.

<sup>46</sup> *Illi ergo ultra jussum aliquid molientes, et nimis indulgentia sua incauti, et eo quod longe esset factum latere lutantes, quibusque petentibus partes, secundum suum libitum, qualicumque munusculo accepto dederunt; et hoc de indominitatis terris*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 114, p. 207-208.

<sup>47</sup> *Dum hec itaque ad nostri noticiam pervenissent, contingentibus nobis in partibus illis advenire, dampnum nostrum videntes, omnino decreveramus in primis id destruendum perperam factum, sed iterum pauperum hominum laborem miserantes, consilio cum fidelibus nostris habito, quid facto opus esset in commune tractavimus*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 114, p. 208.

<sup>48</sup> *Unde quod communi assensu et consilio fratrum et fidelium nostrorum, et ipsorum multiplici rogatu pauperum hominum statuimus, his litterarum testimoniis notificamus, terras illas quas adquisierunt, per hanc caritatem traditionis, solide teneant, possideant, habeant omni tempore, ipsi et posteri eorum et filii filiorum, per nostram donationem et omnium fratrum, sub tali censu et servitio quod juste inventum fuerit et ipsius terre precium exigerit*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 114, p. 208.

<sup>49</sup> *Postquam ergo hanc rationem kartali descriptione firmavimus, contigit hos homines nostram misericordiam adire, tu sibi aliquid terre indominitate concederemus, et nequivimus contradicere tu misericordiam illis non impenderemus; servieruntque statim in presenti quantum potuerunt, et singulis annis in Pascha Domini censum in quatuors solidis denariorum statuerunt*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 114, p. 208.

<sup>50</sup> *Precamur ergo tam presentes quam futuros ut, sicut ipsi quod constituunt fixum et stabile esse volunt, ita propter Deum et quietem pauperum hoc nostrum factum inconvulsum et firmum permittant*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 114, p. 208.

<sup>51</sup> See above, p. 82 and 84.

or, at least, to record arrangements with peasants in writing more systematically as his predecessors. Be that as it may, the Flomersheim charter calls for several observations. Firstly, it reveals how «disobedience» could be organized in a less frontal way than discussed before. Out of the twelve individuals who were granted land by the estate officers, one is identified as a priest and three are also mentioned in the list of *scabini*, i.e. local representatives of the community<sup>52</sup>. These observations suggest that some of the leading and most powerful members of the locality participated in this scheme. They bribed the representatives of the monastery with presents (*munera*, *munuscula*) and services (*servitia*) to get access to land – a strategy we have already encountered under Odelbert<sup>53</sup>. How the abbot was finally informed of this transaction is not clear. A particularly interesting aspect is the rhetoric developed to justify his action: using the notions of labour and poverty, he taps into particular themes of the representation of peasants<sup>54</sup>. These images are somewhat ambiguous, as they are both dismissive and sympathetic to peasant life. Paul Freedman shows that this is a common feature of medieval «images» of peasants. They were «varied, even contradictory, but not irreconcilable. They could be fit into an intelligible pattern, even forming an ideology of exploitation, but it was a pattern with enough internal points of contestation to require constant reinforcement in rebuffing challenges both from within elite circles and from outside, from the peasants themselves»<sup>55</sup>. In this particular case, the patronizing rhetoric developed in the charter presents the abbot as a Christian leader who takes care of the poor and recognizes their hard toil. The appropriation of material goods and labour is therewith inscribed in a relationship of paternalistic protection. This discourse can be understood as part of a «moral economy», that is a moral, normative, and sometimes legal, discourse that is initially formulated by the powerful to support their domination, but can be adopted by subalterns in particular circumstances to support their interests<sup>56</sup>. Interestingly, however, the charter also points to another language, namely that of tenurial arrangement and markets, as rent is expected to appropriately reflect the «price of land»<sup>57</sup>. A final aspect that has to be pointed out is that the Flomersheim charter suggests that, despite the successful intervention of abbot Odelbert, the illegal deal that was made by local elites and estate officers was eventually maintained. The monastery accepted an arrangement that effectively transformed demesne land into tenures. Once more, the initiative for socio-economic transformation can be located within the peasantry.

<sup>52</sup> Their names are Azo presbiter, Regilo, Brimilo, and Woppo. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 114, p. 208.

<sup>53</sup> See above, p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> This is discussed, in a slightly different perspective, by DEVROEY, «Du grand domaine carolingien», p. 288-289.

<sup>55</sup> FREEDMAN, Paul H. *Images of the medieval peasant*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> The concept was initially formulated by THOMPSON, Edward Palmer. «The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century». *Past & Present*, 1971, vol. 50, p. 76-136. For an application to the early Middle Ages, see FAITH, *The moral economy*.

<sup>57</sup> *Sub tali censu et servitio quod juste inventum fuerit et ipsius terre precium exigerit*. D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 114, p. 208.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

These few case-studies do, of course, not provide a clear-cut answer to the question of aristocratic and peasant involvement in the planification of settlements such as Val-lange in 10<sup>th</sup> century Lotharingia. The presented evidence is anecdotal and does certainly not reflect the sheer variety of social dynamics in the region. Early medieval societies were highly fragmented, and power could be exercised in many different ways. However, some interesting observations and conclusions emerge from this micro-historical discussion.

It seems unlikely that large segments of the Lotharingian rural population were beyond reach of aristocratic control. The peasantry was confronted by demands that could be arbitrary and violent. However, the presence of elites was not necessarily permanent and their power not all-encompassing. In some estates of Gorze, St-Maximin in Trier, or St-Martin in Metz, peasants had a relatively large autonomy in the organization of production. They could make decisions and develop strategies to enable the subsistence of their household and meet the demands of their overlord(s). In theoretical terms, the presented case-studies provide empirical examples of social relations and patterns of economic organization whose logic can be described as «feudal» in Marxist terms or as typical of «peasant production» to use the terminology of rural sociology and anthropology<sup>58</sup>. In this model, the central unit of organization is the peasant farm household whose members are both producers and consumers. Subordination and the necessity to produce surplus for their overlords constrain peasants, but they also have a certain level of autonomy in the organization of their productive activities. In this context, markets provide both opportunities and pressures: in most discussed cases, the logic of peasant economies implied a certain involvement with commercial exchange. Abbots such as Odelbert of Gorze (975-984) supported this form of relative autonomy in economic decision-making based on commercial involvement by transferring demesne land to tenants, favoring rent and monetary incomes over direct management.

In this light, one wonders why abbots and monastic communities would have bothered to be directly involved in the planification of rural settlements. Of course, we cannot exclude that they were on occasion. John Blair has made the case that in early medieval England «formal grid-planning» based on the techniques of the Roman *agrimensores* was transmitted through ecclesiastical high culture and applied to lay out monastically-associated settlements<sup>59</sup>. He observes that in the 10<sup>th</sup> century «a proportion of [grid-planned places] were estate centres on monastic land»<sup>60</sup>. However, there is no evidence

<sup>58</sup> On these notions, see respectively: WICKHAM, «Le forme del feudalesimo», p. 33-34; ELLIS, Frank. *Peasant Economics. Farm Households and Agrarian Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 3-16; and MENDRAS, Henri. *Les sociétés paysannes*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1976.

<sup>59</sup> BLAIR, John. «Grid-Planning in Anglo-Saxon Settlements: the Short Perch and the Four-Perch Module». *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 2012, vol. 18, p. 18-61; BLAIR, John. *Building Anglo-Saxon England*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018, p. 70-71, 148-149, 317-324. Unfortunately, I have not yet seen this Author's most recent contribution on this topic: BLAIR, John; RIPPON, Steve and SMART, Christopher. *Planning in the Early Medieval Landscape*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> BLAIR, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 318.



of «intensive row-plan systems» such as Vallange<sup>61</sup>. Moreover, Blair does not exclude that «inhabitants may have borrowed the technology (whether by employing monastic surveyors or by learning the techniques themselves) to restructure their environments»<sup>62</sup>. As pointed out by Chris Dyer and Helena Hamerow, numerous social, economic, and cultural factors might have influenced local societies to adopt more regular layouts for their settlements and field systems<sup>63</sup>. The evidence presented here indeed reveals a certain level of cooperation in daily activities, but without the existence of the strongly formalized «communities» of the later Middle Ages. We do not have to interpret this as the indication of egalitarianism: the evidence discussed above clearly reveals hierarchies within local societies. Some individuals – priests, *scabini*, etc. – stood out and might have been particularly influential in decision-making at the local level.

The available evidence suggests that, to a large extent, abbots and monastic communities were not particularly interested in micro-managing the daily life of peasants. In a few instances, it also appears that peasants benefited from a certain degree of autonomy because aristocrats struggled to implement stronger control<sup>64</sup>. Complex techniques of estate management had been developed in the Carolingian period and were maintained, at least in part, in Lotharingian monasteries in the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>65</sup>. Yet, as the example of Waldorf suggests, the limitations of administrative writing and geographical distance sometimes complicated estate management. Estate officers were often members of local societies and could pursue their own interests rather than those of their monastic overlords. They were submitted to the pressure of other local inhabitants. Peasants occasionally tried to benefit from these structural weaknesses of lordship. Depending on its seriousness, peasant disobedience could be met with less or more harsh responses. Reactions to insubordination could, of course, imply physical violence and expropriation. Yet, in other situations – for example in the case of Flomersheim –, a remonstrance could be followed by a renegotiation of the tenant-lord relation which, as far as we can see,

<sup>61</sup> BLAIR, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 318.

<sup>62</sup> BLAIR, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 318.

<sup>63</sup> See above, n. 7 and 8.

<sup>64</sup> About the limitations and difficulties encountered by social groups and organizations that attempt to control peasant societies, see SCOTT, James. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009; ALFONSO, «La contestation paysanne» and CORRIOL, Vincent. *Les Serfs de Saint-Claude. Étude sur la condition servile au Moyen Âge*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009, p. 209-215.

<sup>65</sup> See DEVROEY, Jean-Pierre. «Gérer et exploiter la distance. Pratiques de gestion et perception du monde dans les livres fonciers carolingiens». In LE JAN, Régine; DEPREUX, Philippe and BOUGARD, François. *Les élites et leurs espaces: mobilité, rayonnement, domination du VI<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> s. Rencontres de Göttingen, 3-5 mars 2005*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007, p. 49-66; DEVROEY, Jean-Pierre. «Au-delà des polyptyques: Sédimentation, copie et renouvellement des documents de gestion seigneuriaux entre Seine et Rhin (IX<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)». In HERMAND, Xavier; NIEUS, Jean-François and RENARD, Étienne. *Décrire, inventorier, enregistrer entre Seine et Rhin au Moyen Âge*. Paris: École des Chartes, 2013, p. 53-86; SCHROEDER, Nicolas and WILKIN, Alexis. «Documents de gestion inédits provenant de l'abbaye de Stavelot-Malmedy et concernant les domaines de Lantremange, Jenneret et Louveigné (X<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècle)». *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d'Histoire*, 2014, vol. 180, p. 35-39.

was not entirely opposed to the initial objectives of peasants. This remark has important implications.

Several scholars have recently focused on a few charters that were written in 10<sup>th</sup> century Lotharingia to record manorial customs, rent, and services<sup>66</sup>. Interestingly, these documents claim to be the outcome of negotiations between monastic communities and the dependants of one of their estates. In 932, the men of Stavelot in the estate of Xhoris successfully required to have their labour services reduced to one day a week<sup>67</sup>. In 967, the men of Gorze in Morville asked the abbot to reduce their service<sup>68</sup>. They used to serve on request, but by arguing that seigniorial requests are lighter in neighboring monastic estates, they convinced the abbot to limit their services. In 984, the men of Gorze in Brouch asked the abbot to record and keep their manorial customs as they used to be in the past, when Brouch was a fiscal estate<sup>69</sup>. As pointed out by Charles West, there are no similar known documents from the Carolingian period<sup>70</sup>. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the initiative to write up estate records such as Polyptychs came from lords, not from dependants. The emergence of this new type of document in the 10<sup>th</sup> century might reflect several dynamics. Charles West has argued that these charters are «the most dramatic examples of a noticeable growth in the documentation of interest in the dues owed by peasants to those who controlled the land»<sup>71</sup>. He sees this «shift in diplomatic» as part of «a significant development in the conception of landownership»<sup>72</sup>. Taking into account the observations made in this paper, we could also interpret them as evidence of the political capacity of some segments of the Lotharingian peasantry to negotiate with their overlords. The background of this movement was formed by the inescapable presence of aristocratic power, but also the structural limitations of lordship and a «moral economy» that patronized peasants, but could also be mobilized to support their interests. Moreover, some peasant households developed an efficient economic model of subsistence farming integrated in market exchange. Monasteries such as Gorze seem to have supported this particular model, by granting more means of production and autonomy to peasants in exchange for surplus.

<sup>66</sup> See the discussions in WEST, *Reframing the feudal revolution*, p. 148-154 and DEVROEY, Jean-Pierre and KNAEPEN, Arnaud. «Confronter la coutume domaniale entre seigneurs et paysans en Lorraine au x<sup>e</sup> siècle». In JÉGOU, Laurent; LIENHARD, Thomas; JOYE, Sylvie and SCHNEIDER, Jens. *Faire lien. Aristocratie, réseaux et échanges compétitifs. Mélanges en l'honneur de Régine Le Jan*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015, pp. 155-178.

<sup>67</sup> HALKIN and ROLAND, *Recueil des chartes*, n. 59. See SCHROEDER, Nicolas. *Les hommes et la terre de saint Remacle. Histoire soadsociale et économique de l'abbaye de Stavelot-Malmedy, VII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2015, p. 179.

<sup>68</sup> TOCK, Benoît-Michel. *La diplomatie française de Haut Moyen Âge: inventaire des chartes originales antérieures à 1121 conservées en France*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2001, n. 212. See DEVROEY and KNAEPEN, «Confronter la coutume».

<sup>69</sup> D'HERBOMEZ, *Cartulaire*, n. 116, p. 211-213. See DEVROEY and KNAEPEN, «Confronter la coutume».

<sup>70</sup> WEST, *Reframing the feudal revolution*, p. 151.

<sup>71</sup> WEST, *Reframing the feudal revolution*, p. 153.

<sup>72</sup> WEST, *Reframing the feudal revolution*, p. 153-154.

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